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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the current status of precollege psychology teachers and what training and preparation these teachers have had for this position. Inquiry was also made into what is actually being taught at the secondary level. A two-part questionnaire was addressed to 2,000 secondary principals to obtain data. Responses (N=700) indicated that on the average, the major part of the teaching schedule of teachers of psychology is spent teaching other subjects, i.e., English, history, sociology. Most of the teachers did not major in psychology itself and have taken only a limited number of credit hours in psychology. Social studies is the certification area of most high school psychology teachers. Topics most emphasized by the teachers were personality, development, learning, mental health, and behavioral disorders. Suggestions are made for improving the preparation of precollege psychology teachers. (JD)

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The Status of Teachers and Teacher Education in High School Psychology

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People in the field of high school psychology feel they have a general familiarity with the basic facts concerning the rapid growth of psychology as a part of the high school curriculum in the last twenty-five years. However, definite, complete and current data as to who teaches these precollege psychology courses and what training they receive for this important task is generally lacking. It is essential to know the current state of this field in order to establish well-founded and useful guidelines for future practice in this area.

The topic to be addressed in this presentation is a description of the current status of precollege psychology teachers and what training and preparation these teachers have had for this position. More specifically, information has been collected in order to answer several research questions. These are, first, who teaches high school psychology? Secondly, what preparation have these teachers had to teach psychology at the secondary level? This includes academic and professional background and preparation. Thirdly, what is the nature of the teaching certification held by these teachers? Fourthly, what is actually being taught at the secondary level, and how?

These research questions were studied using a cross-sectional, descriptive mass survey technique. A pilot study of 200 surveys was sent out in March, 1986, with a return rate of approximately 44%. Modifications were made and the major project of 2000 surveys was sent out in October, 1986, with a return rate of approximately 35%.

The sample used was a stratified random sample of secondary principals (approximately 10% of the total population of U.S. high schools). The names of principals were drawn from the membership list of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The decision was made to address the questionnaires to high school principals, and in turn, teachers in the schools, as this is the closest connection with the desired data. Lists of high school psychology teachers are unavailable or innaccurate. Sources such as state departments of education have also been notoriously unreliable.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part, to be completed by the principals, asks basic information about psychology course offerings, and demographic data on the school. The second part is answered by the teacher of psychology in the school, if any. These questions concern students, curriculum, teaching methods, text and materials used, self-description as teachers, their teacher preparation, their certification, and their knowledge of APA services.

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The attached information represents selected results relating to each of the four research questions being investigated.

In summarizing and drawing together the data in the four research areas certain significant trends emerge. On average, teachers of psychology have taught other courses before beginning to teach psychology. In fact they have taught psychology only about half as

long as they have been teaching high school. The other subjects taught range from art and math to driver's education, electronics and English as a second language, but are mostly concentrated in the various social studies, particularly history. In addition, data shows that the majority of psychology teachers do not teach the majority of their schedule in psychology, but in their other subjects. They usually teach only one or two classes of psychology a day.

In terms of teacher preparation two significant conclusions emerge. As other studies have found, most high school psychology teachers did not major in psychology, and have taken only a limited number of credit hours in psychology itself. Most majored in various social studies, and even at the masters level have concenrated on education or guidance, rather than psychology.

Another important area to look at is the actual content of the psychology courses taken, in addition to just the credit hours. The most often studied areas are general psychology, educational psychology and adolescent and child psychology. Many of the topics studied by teachers are not the subjects they will emphasize with high school students. For example, only 56.9% of teachers indicate they have studied personality theory, yet 97.9% include this topic in their curriculum.

In the certification area, the data shows that social studies is the license most often held by psychology teachers. Only 42.6% indicate they are certified specifically to teach psychology.

Finally, in terms of curriculum, those topics most emphasized by teachers are personality, development, learning and mental health and behavioral disorders. This is in line with the fact that most teachers describe their course as generally being personality-developmental or interpersonal-social in focus, as opposed to scientific-experimental or humanistic. This is also confirmed by the goals teachers feel are most important for their courses. They list self-knowledge and understanding at the top, as well as development of social and interpersonal skills.

Based on the data collected here and a knowledge of other trends in the field certain recommendations and suggestions for future practice emerge. First, increased networking of psychology teachers is essential. Psychology teachers often have many other classes to prepare in addition to psychology, and have little or no colleague support available in their schools. Therefore, going beyond the individual school to local, regional or national groups in which an exchange of ideas can take place is valuable for often isolated secondary psychology teachers. Organizations such as APA afilliates, Psychology Special Interest Group of the NCSS, Northeast Regional Teachers of Psychology, New York State Teachers of Psychology should be put to expanded use.

Secondly, in the area of preservice preparation, content areas studied by prospective psychology teachers should be those that will eventually be taught to students. College students of psychology might want to consult the new APA suggested curriculum to see what topics might be emphasized at the secondary level.

Also in the preservice area, greater attention needs to be paid by universities to special methods courses and student teaching opportunities. Teachers prepared to teach other social studies courses indicated they found differences between teaching psychology and their other social studies classes, particularly in the areas of different subject matter knowledge required, sensitive/personal nature of the subject matter, and the increased student interest shown in the subject matter.

86.8% of the teachers responding had taken a course in methods of secondary education. Of these courses only 3.9% were specialized to psychology, while 62.2% had taken social studies methods. Only 3.3% indicated studying methods of science teaching, which is significant in terms of the scientific nature of the material in the psychology curriculum. 20.1% said their methods course was of no value in teaching psychology, and 44.9% said it had only "some value." Not more than approximately 24% of teachers had been prepared in specific areas relating to psychology teaching, such as ethical principles of psychology teaching, choosing objectives for a psychology course, special methods of teaching psychology, handling sensitive issues in psychology or working with lab animals.

As indicated in the attached data, only 8.9% of responding teachers had done student teaching in psychology. Of those who did, however, 84.1% found it "valuable" or "very valuable". Colleges providing teacher preparation need to be able to address the felt needs of prospective psychology teachers in these areas of methods and field experience.

Inservice provided by universities, school districts or professional organizations can go a long way toward remedying the gaps that exist from inadequate preservice preparation.

In the area of certification, 63.6% of teachers felt there should not be separate certification for psychology, while 36.2% felt there should be such certification. This is probably a practical approach because most teachers do not have positions where they teach exclusively psychology. Based on the responses received to this survey a certification in comprehensive social studies, including certain courses required in psychology, seems the most practical approach for a prospective teacher. Interestingly, teachers displayed a great lack of knowledge concerning certification requirements in their states, with 43.8% responding they did not know if requirements other than credit hours were listed for state certification.

Among other things learned, I believe the data gathered reveal the need for a more active role for the APA in fulfilling the needs of high school psychology teachers. The APA could be a valuable source of information concerning curriculum and preparation guidelines to teachers and teacher training institutions. More inservice training could also be provided through workshops, publications, and newsletters based on the needs expressed by these responding teachers.

I. Who teaches high school psychology?

1. average years teaching = 15 years

2. average years teaching psychology = 8.6 years

3. percent of teaching load which is psychology

100%	11.6%
80%	8.0%
60%	15.6%
40%	22.3%
20%	40.4%

4. What other subjects are taught, in addition to psychology?

U.S. History	46.8%
Sociology	42.4%
Social Studies	33.2%
Govt/Civics	27.7%
World History	25.7%

(total of 46 subjects mentioned)

5. How did you come to teach psychology?

my choice	53.3%
assigned to me because I was more qualified educationally	37.9%
assigned to me because I was willing	31.9%
student demand	4.0%

6. Demographics

Sex: Male 67% Female 31.5%

Age:

21-29	8.7%
30-39	37.7%
40-49	35.7%
50-59	14.7%
60+	1.6%

Professional organization membership

NCSS	30.4%
APA affiliate	18.3%
none	9.8%
NEA	6.7%
local psych teachers assoc	5.4%
NSTA	0.9%

Colleague support (# of psych. teachers in your school)

1	79.8%
2	15.5%
3	3.2%
4+	1.5%

II. What preparation have teachers had to teach psychology?

1. Undergraduate major

social studies	27.5%
history	20.7%
psychology	15.2%
English	8.0%
physical ed	5.4%
political sci	4.2%
education	4.0%
sociology	4.0%
biology	1.6%
business	1.3%

(19 others mentioned)

2. Graduate education

masters		94.1%
doctorate		1.0%
Major:	education	16.7%
	guidance	16.1%
	psychology	6.5%
	social stud	6.5%

3. Average undergraduate credit hours in psychology = 19.8 hrs.
   Average graduate credit hours in psychology = 16.9 hrs

4. Average undergrad credit hours related to psychology = 15.6 hrs
   Average graduate credit hours related to psychology = 19.2 hrs

5. Content areas studied

general (intro) psych	94.9%
educational psych	94.0%
adol & child psych	83.5%
developmental psych	66.1%
tests & measurements	60.3%
abnormal psych	59.4%
social psych	59.4%
personality theory	56.9%
statistics	52.0%
learning theory	48.2%

6. Preservice preparation

   a) in terms of subject matter knowledge:
      83.7% feel they had adequate prep in psychology before beginning to teach psychology

      95.1% feel they are now adequately prepared

   b) in terms of methods of teaching psychology:
      70.0% feel they had adequate prep in psychology before beginning to teach psychology

      91.2% feel they are now adequately prepared

c) 85.5% did not do student teaching in psychology
8.9% did do student teaching in psychology
5.6% did not do student teaching

7. Inservice preparation desired

classroom activites	62.1%
current developments in psych	61.6%
workshops	60.0%
materials	58.9%
exchange of ideas w/ colleagues	52.9%

III. Certification held

social studies	74.1%
history	43.1%
sociology	26.1%
English	11.8%
P.E.	10.5%
counseling	7.6%
behavioral science	7.4%

certified specifically to teach psychology: yes 42.6%
no 57.2%

IV. Curriculum issues relating to teacher preparation

1. Topics taught in high school:

personality	97.9%
learning	93.9%
mental health	92.9%
emotions	91.7%
development	88.2%
motivation	83.7%
memory	80.8%
sensation	77.0%
scientific meth	76.8%
biol of behavior	73.7%
states of consc.	73.7%

2. Topics most emphasized:
personality
development
learning
mental health

3. General description of course:

personality-developmental	47.8%
interpersonal-social	25.9%
humanistic	11.4%
scientific-experimental	9.4%
N/A	5.5%

4. Goals of course ranked most important by teachers:
   - self-knowledge and understanding
   - knowledge of major concepts and theories
   - critical thinking skills
   - social and interpersonal skills

5. Teaching methods used most often:
   - lecture-discussion
   - audio-visual
   - small group work
   - individual projects/term papers
   - inquiry method

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